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AUTHOR Fereshteh, M. Hussein
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ABSTRACT

When Japanese education is considered from a Western perspective, the stereotypical image seems to be that of a rigid, achievement-oriented, and traditional system, producing technologically-focused human beings. This presentation focuses on the human and cultural dimensions of Japanese society and on how Japanese children are motivated to achieve and surpass their American counterparts. A framework is provided for examining: (1) the complex cultural collaborations or interrelationships that exist in Japan among parents, schools, and society; (2) the society's cultural and philosophical bases, specifically, that human beings are a single, harmonious physical and mental unit defined by relationships with others (in contrast to the private, objective, individualistic values of the West); (3) the strong Japanese national identity which is reinforced by fundamental philosophic and moral principles and ethics; (4) the traditional role of the mother and her responsibilities as the main source of influence in the family; (5) the relationship between education and occupation; (6) the course of study in elementary schools; (7) the highly competitive entrance examinations required for a student to enter a high school or university; and (8) the nature of reform efforts in Japanese schools. (LL)

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THE U.S. AND JAPANESE EDUCATION: SHOULD THEY BE COMPARED?

M. Hussein Fereshteh, Ph.D.

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

Department of Curriculum & Foundations

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THE U.S. AND JAPANESE EDUCATION: SHOULD THEY BE COMPARED?

By
M. Hussein Fereshteh, Ph.D.

> "In this gentle country a man may stoop down and write his name in the very dust, certain that, if the writing be craftily done, his children's children will reverently let it *stand*."
>
> *Rudyard Kipling*
> *Letters From Japan*

When one considering Japan from a Western perspective (in the 1980s and 1990s), one is likely to visualize a country whose great economic success seems to a large extent to be the consequence of a rigid, achievement-oriented, and traditional educational system which produces technologically-focused human beings. Certainly, this perception is the Japanese stereotype currently propagated in the United States and further distorted through media hype, business attitudes and cursory studies. When we inquire behind the surface and expose the human and cultural dimensions of Japanese society, what do we find? What exactly motivates Japanese children and students to achieve and surpass their American counterparts? The answer to this question is found by examining the complex cultural interrelationships or cultural collaborations that exists in Japan among parents, schools, and society to utilize the past and present cultural values to insure future success.

The Society's Cultural and Philosophical Basis

In order to understand the premise of Japanese education and how it effects economic success, one has to have a basic understanding of Japanese philosophy and psychology. What is it to be Japanese? As a culture, the Japanese have a strong national identity which is reinforced by fundamental philosophic and moral principles and ethics.

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Two of the most well known and influential modern Japanese philosophers were Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960) and Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945). Their work revolve around two aspects of Japanese thought that are essential to the Japanese experience. The first of these presents the view that man is a single harmonious unit and the mind are inseparable entities. Consequently, the process of personal cultivation and self-reflection involves both physical and mental action. The second premise, which lies at the core of Japanese philosophy, is the idea that foremost in human experience is "the fact that man lives in the field of whole human relationships rather than as individuals."[1] Since man is defined by his relationships with others, Watsuji's fundamental contention is That one can only attempt to grasp the identity of the individual within the context of his human relationships. Watsuji's ethic is designed as a Japanese system based upon the essential relationships of man to man, man to family and man to society. In contrast to the private, objective, individualistic, and "individual ethics and values of the West, his ethic sees man as involved in community and society."[2]

This perception of the Japanese self, or individual, as being a part of a larger cohesive group is expressed in the Japanese term for human being, "ningen," which literally means "between person and person."

This view of humanity is nurtured in traditional Japanese thought.

It is impossible to extrapolate the individual from the social world into which he is born. As mentioned previously, and along this same line of thought, is the Japanese belief that it is impossible to separate the mind from the body as is done in the western societies.

The Japanese Zen master Eisai popularized the term "shinjin ichinyo" which means "the oneness of body-mind." This concept stands in opposition to popular schools of

Western thought that perpetuate dualism, such as the Cartesian principle of mind and body, and the Christian concept of the spirit and the flesh. In Japan, they adhere to the notion of "learning with the body"; "Eastern tradition maintains that "true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking but only through the utilization of one's total mind and body."[3] Consequently, to the Japanese, the essence of meditation, looking inward, and activity, or looking outward, is one and the same. Since there exists a cohesion and a unity between the physical and the spiritual, to train the mind, one must also train the body and vice versa. At the root of the Japanese philosophy of life is the belief that there is harmony between all elements rather than separation among components. This concept is deeply instilled in Japanese culture and reflected in Japanese modes of child-rearing, schooling, attitudes toward human relationships, and in general the structure of their educational system.

In a broad sense, this concept of group cohesion dictates the overall form of the Japanese society.

Japanese awareness of the limitations of their physical environment and the Japanese view of their country as extremely fragile due to geographic factors have, historically, influenced the Japanese mode of existence, survival, and technological advances. Japan is a narrow island country, low in natural resources and vulnerable to enemies, earthquakes, and fires.

These attributes have over the centuries instilled in the Japanese a national sense of "precarious deficiency."[4] As a nation, Japan perceives itself as constantly existing on the edge of disaster. Some theorists believe this Japanese self-perception is responsible for a phenomenon they refer to as "National Individualism;" as individuals, the Japanese strive for conformity, but as a complete nation, they believe themselves to be unique.[5] One

particularly important consequence of Japanese national identity is that the Japanese have come to recognize human potential and unitedness as their most valuable resource. The success of future planning in Japan does not rest on reserves of oil or minerals but, instead, on the continuous propagation of a hard-working, mutually respecting and trusting, and well-educated population. Consequently, children are considered to be the country's most valuable asset and as an outgrowth of this ideology, education is the focus and the priority within the Japanese family and society.

Commitment to the education and the welfare of children penetrates all strata of Japanese society. In Japan, education seems to be seen as a fundamental necessity for continued industrial expansion, national unity, international political stature, personal development, moral character-building, cultural continuity and the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.[6] *For Japanese, unlike most Americans, education and family are the web upon which present and future success depend.*

The Japanese perception of their nation as lacking in natural resources and economic stability affected their behavior is between patterns.

A Japanese analyst, Merry White, observes the following:

> *Among the Japanese a conviction that they are living on the very edge is a driving cultural force that shapes not only industrial process and international negotiation, but also lies at the core of household management and parent-child relationships.*[7]

How exactly does the experience of the Japanese child differ from that of the American child?

In Japan, child rearing is indisputedly the responsibility of the mother and accordingly, "the central relationship in Japanese culture is between mother and child."[8] *From both, the Japanese mother's perception of her relationship to the child differs from that of the American mother. Caudhill and Weinstein note that in Japan, the infant is*

seen through the birth process as having become separated from the mother.[9] *Accordingly, the Japanese mother recognizes the need to draw the child increasingly into interdependent relations with her and others. Certainly, in America, the infant is viewed as dependent on others. In their research, Cauldhill and Weinstein found this fundamental difference in perception had an effect on styles of child rearing. They found Japanese mothers spend more time with their children, emphasize physical contact over verbal communication, and have as their primary goal a passive and contented baby. On the other hand, American mothers spend less time with their children, emphasize verbal interaction over physical contact, and have as their goal an active and self-assertive baby. It appears in Japan that "culturalization" begins at birth; mothers consciously foster characteristics in their children that will enable them to adapt to their society.*

Since the family is the primary unit and an important institution in Japan, child rearing practices are oriented toward establishing close emotional bonds between family members, and particularly between mother and child. The Japanese baby learns to be dependent on his mother in a number of ways. One practice that increases dependency is physical bonding.

As noted earlier, Japanese mothers emphasize physical contact over verbal communication. When the child is born, the mother sleeps with the infant; This process of physical bonding is referred to as kinship. As soon as the newborn cries, the baby is immediately picked up and held close to the mother's body. The Japanese infant is usually carried on the mother's back wherever she goes; they are rarely separated. This constant physical interaction between mother and child provides the child with a great sense of security in his early years.

Perhaps, the child maintains a close physical relationship to family members

throughout his life. The practice of co-sleeping is a unique part of the Japanese identity which reinforces the child's sense of existing within a group. Unlike America, where sleeping is primarily a solitary experience outside of marriage, the Japanese infant sleeps with his mother or both parents, and as he grows older, will probably sleep with a grandparent or another family member. Caudhill and Plath, in a study titled "Who Sleeps by Whom? Parent-Child Involvement in Urban Japanese Families," indicate how co-sleeping arrangements reflect and influence Japanese identity:

> *Sleeping arrangements in Japanese families tend to blur the distinctions between generations and between the sexes, to emphasize the interdependence more that the separateness of individuals, and to underplay (or largely ignore) the potentiality for the growth of conjugal intimacy between husband and wife in sexual and other matters in favor of a more general familial cohesion.*[10]

The researchers also note an interesting coincidence between the two periods of life when one is most likely to sleep alone and the two age periods when suicide is most likely to occur. Neither Cauldhill nor Plath believe this to be a causal relationship, but they note these two life phases, late adolescence and old age, are both transitional periods involving the establishment of an identity apart from one's natural family:

> *It might be that sleeping alone in these two periods contributes to a sense of isolation and alienation for an individual who, throughout the rest of his life cycle, seems to derive a significant part of his sense of being a meaningful person from his sleeping physically close by other family members.*[11]

Their research acutely reveals the Japanese orientation toward the group and how the concept permeates the family unit.

The behavior of the Japanese mother is governed by "amae," a Japanese psychological term made familiar to the West by Takeo Doi in The Anatomy of Dependence. The concept of amae is closely linked to the mother's desire to foster dependence in her child. Doi defines amae as "the desire to be passively loved" or

unconditionally taken care of.[12] *Amae is central to Japanese child rearing ideas and practices.*

Basically, the mother provides the child with complete assurance of security and unconditional love. The chief mothering strategy in accordance with amae is to never go against the child, a Japanese technique called "wakaseru" or "getting the child to understand."[13]

From a Western standpoint, the Japanese child seems to be totally indulged by the mother. However, for the Japanese this system appears to be an effective means of shaping the child's behavior. While Western child rearing practices tend to emphasize "power assertive" methods of control, the Japanese utilize a "love oriented" technique.[14] *Once again, the divergent priorities of American society and Japanese society are reflected in their different approaches to child rearing. In Japan, the child will always have the sense of belonging to a system of groups (family, church, school, community, company, and nation), and consequently, "intimacy and supportive attention to a child are used by the mother to teach her or him not only society's social standards and ethical norms but also the need to work hard to achieve and be valued in society."*[15]

As one researcher explains, for the Japanese "knowing that your son is self-willed means that you know what strategy you must use with him to get him to cooperate; it does not mean that you reinforce or value the quality in itself."[16] *The child rearing emphasis in Japan is on teaching the child to be able to function and cooperate in a social environment. "there is in Japan no conflict between the goals of self-fulfillment and the goals of social integration. The bridge between them lays in the socialization that occurs in the relationship between mother and child."*[17]

In order to be a productive individual and a successful member of Japanese

society, one must develop seishen, or individual spirit and character. The process of building seishen has many components, several of which reflect Japanese values of human conduct and behavior.

The development of seinshen is the principle goal of both Japanese mothering and the Japanese educational system. Concepts that comprise seishen are: sunao, yutaka, kuro, and hansei. The Japanese word sunao roughly translates into "obedience" but the meanings are not equivalent when viewed in their cultural context. The Japanese connotation of sunao is open-minded, nonresistant and truthful. It implies "authentic in intent and cooperative in spirit."[18] In English, the term obedient suggests subordination and lack of self-determination but, in Japan, sunao "assumes cooperation to be an act of affirmation of the self."[19] To the Japanese:

> *A child who is sunao has not sacrificed his personal autonomy on the alter of cooperation. Cooperating with others does not imply giving up the self, as it may in the West, but in fact implies that working with others is the appropriate means by which one expresses and enhances oneself. Engagement and harmony with others is a positively valued goal, and the bridge to open-hearted cooperation is sensitivity, as first understood by the mother's example and encouragement.[20]*

Another quality encouraged by both mother and school is yutaka. The English equivalents are: empathetic, receptive, and open-hearted.

In developing yutaka, one develops the ability to anticipate the needs of others and is thus able to give and receive in abundance. Yutaka is an active principle in Japanese society. Recently, the concept of yutaka has appeared in Japan's official recommendations for educational reform. One such entry reads:

The hope is that by liberalizing education while maintaining the importance of traditional social morality, Japan can produce children with yutaka na kokoro (confident sensitive hearts)."[21]

Two other beneficial processes which aid in the child's development are kuro and hansei. Kuro is suffering or hardship; the Japanese believe that it is beneficial for a child to endure kuro which can be manifested psychologically, physically, or environmentally. They believe that kuro deepens and strengthens the self by removing self-centeredness. Kuro is a virtue because it builds character which is acquired through self-discipline. Kuro is not an end in itself; more important is the process of enduring or persisting, in Japanese, gambaru. As is mentioned before, the concept of self-discipline is not defined within the Japanese culture as it is within the American. Self-discipline, to the Japanese, is a process that refines and enhances the self and the Japanese concept of self-discipline incorporates the body-mind principle of Japanese philosophy. Physical strength and well-being are important because a healthy body is able to endure and recover; a healthy body reflects a healthy mind. It is also important to recognize in the development of seishen is the practice of hansel, self-examination or reflection. Through hansel or self-analysis, one finds the motivation to improve. The concept of hansel is not only of value on the personal level, but also on a local and national levels. The Japanese highly regard introspection as a means of improvement and a method for determining future actions. Thus, promoting sansei in the child is the primary goal of the mother in conjunction with the school. In Japan, potential is viewed as egalitarian: everyone has it but some people work harder to develop it than others.

Consequently, the Japanese mother believes that her child harbors the potential for unlimited success.

The Mother's Role, Responsibilities, and Society's Expectations

In part, the contemporary ideal of Japanese womanhood still stems from the traditional Confucian-based concept of the woman as "ryosai kenbo," "a good wife and a

wise mother."[22] In this perception of the female, she is totally defined by her relationships to others; she exists only within the context of her husband and her family. Although in modern Japanese society more emphasis is put on "wise," this format for female identity is still widely supported. As White notes in her research, the Confucian-based ideal is accepted by most Japanese women. In one recent poll, 76% responded that their primary responsibility is to the children.[23] The female identity in Japan is still dependent on marriage and motherhood. The Japanese mother bares the responsibility for her children's future and she "evaluates success in her own life through the success of her children."[24] The Japanese woman's main source of influence and value rests in the family. To a large extent, the society's high degree of achievement rests on female acceptance of and engagement in their traditionally defined role. Hall and Beardsley, in Twelve Doors to Japan offer some psychological insight concerning the Japanese woman:

> *The mother's chief gratification in life must be various, for she herself must be submissive and satisfy others, not aggressive and self-expression is usually interpreted, and correctly so, as a disadvantage of being a woman in Japan; but her sociological weakness carries the seed of psychological strength which gives her power over those who depend on her, even to the extent of quelling rebellion by her own suffering. To achieve vicariously through her children is a task that takes its physical toll but gives an outlet for otherwise bottled-up aggression and, if she has successfully forged the bonds of loving control, must also occasionally give her the exhilaration of victory.[25]*

The mother's investment in the child is an investment in herself and also fulfills an important role in Japanese society. It is she who must instill in the child the fundamental social values that will enable the child to function in school and, ultimately, the workforce.

The father is relatively absent in the child's life due to the demands of male career commitments. Since children are a priority in Japan, to be a mother, one is responsible

for the overall welfare and education of children and it is a highly valued position in the estimation of Japanese society. Although denigrated as female responsibility, it is ironically, one of the ultimate goals of Western feminism to have the function of the mother to be regarded with as much importance as any other demanding career.

Roles within Japanese society are extremely segregated according to gender, but one gets the impression that although responsibilities are separated, they are equally valued. The Japanese recognize each component is necessary if the whole unit is to thrive. The Japanese male could not achieve in the workforce as he does, if the Japanese household was not primarily a self-sufficient matriarchal structure. As Japan has taken its place as an international industrial leader, one cannot help but wonder what the future holds for Japanese women.

Although employment opportunities are opening up for women, most women currently leave their jobs to raise their children.

It seems that any type of employment in Japan is believed to require 100% of an individuals effort and this expectation holds true for both men and women.

White explains the consequences of this attitude on the role of Japanese women:

> *A Japanese person is valued by the degree of commitment he invests in an activity, and more, by the degree of engagement he has in the human relationships that give meaning to that activity. So it becomes obvious that a mother who works outside the home can give the necessary 100 percent nowhere.*[26]

Culturally, the Japanese woman is gridlocked into her role as mother. Catherine Colman, an American family therapist practicing in Kyoto, does not foresee any revolutionary change in the stature of the Japanese female as a consequence of Japan's world position in the 1980s.[27] *However, the average Japanese woman can expect to live until she is eighty years old, it seems that a government with foresight would be exploring*

avenues for utilizing these women beyond their child rearing years. There are currently campaigns in Japan against both the latchkey child who comes home to an empty house because his mother works, and the overprotected child who can do nothing for himself because his mother is so involved in his life. Any change in the role of the Japanese mother will have an effect on the child and upset the balance of the Japanese family and, in the long term, the composite of Japanese society. Currently, the child's affective engagement, his incentive to achieve and conform to external expectations are all founded and encouraged within the primary relationship between mother and child. Since an overwhelming number of Japanese women support the status quo, it is doubtful the role of the Japanese woman will evolve significantly in the near future.

Education and Occupation Relations

Japanese society understands the clear relationship between education and occupation so it sees the functions of the school are to equalize opportunity and classify by ability. The educational system is designed to maximize each child's potential. The Japanese view this responsibility as societal rather than individual.

Since the end of the second World War, the means for deriving the most out of life in Japan has been tied to education. The school's ambitions tax the student: "Zeal, striving, and self-abnegation are to be combined with cheerfulness and sensitivity to others--all within the context of learning to love one's hometown and to protect the land, culture and traditions of the motherland, and...to be aware of one's responsibility as a Japanese."[28] *School is mandatory in Japan for children between the ages of six and fifteen, but and although secondary education is optional, 94% of Japanese students finish high school. Many Japanese children attend a preschool by the age of three or four. In a survey of mothers' attitudes toward preschool education in Japan, researchers found the mothers*

felt that a preschool "should provide a safe environment for physical development and that cognitive learning is not to be emphasized--they want the school to stress socialization and deemphasize preparation for elementary school."[29] When asked what qualities they valued in a preschool teacher, "they ranked gentleness and caring first, then patience and technical knowledge."[30] The researchers found the environment of the Japanese preschool to be warm and nurturing, nonacademic, and play-oriented. The teachers are primarily concerned with the children's social and behavioral development. The Japanese teacher assumes that children want to be good and this belief is reflected in their style of classroom management. Early in the educational experience, the child learns she or he is one among many whose needs have to be met; in "Japan, it seems that not only does one wait one's turn for highly valued personal attention, but one also learns that there are clear rewards for being attentive to other people and sensitive to their ideas and concerns."[31] The Japanese mother reinforces the child's preschool experience through activities she does with the child at home. At this point in his development, the child begins to learn that understanding "the way" is more important than producing the perfect product. The emphasis is on the process rather than the result and the child learns there is a right way to do things and it is worth all the time it takes to get to know that way. The mother also teaches the child to concentrate at this age: "The importance of single-minded effort, of intense dedication, is very clearly imparted to the child. The mother keeps the youngster doing only one thing at a time."[32] Japanese children are taught that each repetition of a process always contains something new, a lesson which helps to prevent tedium and boredom. Overall, White notes, "the mother's and teacher's most significant contribution to a child's future is a capacity to instill the importance of engagement, the same engagement they themselves show--positive, wholehearted, energetic

commitment--while at work on task to produce a result."[33] The following observations were recorded by a Western visitor to a Japanese elementary school:

> *First, priority was given to feelings, predispositions, and opportunities for discovery rather than providing facts and getting to an answer fast. The teacher emphasized process, engagement, and commitment rather than discipline (in our sense) and outcome. Second, assignments were made to groups... Individual progress and achievement are closely monitored, but children are supported, praised, and allowed scope for trial and error within the group.[34]*

Japanese classrooms are generally noisy and chaotic, contrary to Western expectations. The Japanese child attends school about 240 days a year, including half-day sessions on Saturdays.

A class averages 42 students to one teacher. In part because of the high student to teacher ratio, many differences are evident between the American and the Japanese school. Distinctions are particularly apparent in expectations for pupil behavior and instructor intervention.[35] The Japanese teacher delegates more authority to children than his U.S. counterpart.

He intervenes less quickly in arguments, and has lower expectations for noise control. The teacher gives the children fewer verbal cues and makes more use of peer-group approval and control, and less of the teacher's direct influence. In addition, he organizes more structured large group activities.

The Japanese curriculum stresses fundamentals. The cognitive goal of the primary school is to give the child a uniform base for further development of skills.and abilities. At the elementary level, the subjects that receive the greatest number of study hours are Japanese, arithmetic, and physical education.

Once again, we see how the concept of a united body-mind is carried over into the curriculum. Other subjects studied in the elementary school are: social studies, science,

music, art, and moral education. The Japanese do not have a national program aimed at developing skills in high technology among children. Japanese teachers mostly agree that "class time is too precious to use machines."[36] White asserts: "Americans spend much more time and money on technology in the schools, and less, overall, on enhancing the environment and the skill of the teacher."[37]

Although, it seems that Japanese children are pampered in their home environments, at school they assume extra responsibilities. Janitorial and kitchen services are not provided for students in the Japanese school system. The children are responsible for keeping the school clean, serving lunch, and taking care of the school garden. These activities reinforce the idea of group cooperation along with self-discipline, in the Japanese sense and they teach respect for school property.

Every facet of the curriculum in the Japanese primary school is related to citizenship education. "Moral education as a field of the school curriculum aims to internalize and deepen a sense of morality in accordance with the children's individuality and immediate stories and examples involving cases of social dilemma, especially centering on incidents that involve human relationships and interdependencies."[38] Children are presented with problems that involve conflicts of loyalties, family strife, and temptations to bad behavior. Through open discussion, the entire class must develop an analysis and solution. The solution is not valued unless it is generated by the class itself and has unanimous support from the whole group.

In morals classes, not only is the content of the lesson important but also the means by which the class and teacher understand the process. In Japan, the process is referred to as nemawashii or digging around the roots. The analogy is that just as one would not try to pull up a tree stump without accounting for all the roots, one should not try to

impose a perspective or solution on the group without eliciting the wholehearted consent of each individual. This concept, once again, illustrates the strong emphasis on unity of purpose, agreement, and harmony which lays at the core of Japanese morality and, accordingly, comprises a central portion of education on cultural values. The official description of moral education reads as follows:

> *Moral education...is aimed at realizing a spirit of respect for human dignity in the actual life of family, school and community, endeavoring to create a culture that is rich in individuality and to develop a democratic society and state, training Japanese to be capable of contributing to a peaceful international society, and cultivating their morality as the foundation thereof.*[39]

Similarly, the goals of the schools, as extracted from the Ministry of Education's Course of Study in Elementary Schools in Japan, *encompass concepts that accord with Japanese values in individuals and culture. One should always respect another's freedom and act according to one's own beliefs. In addition, the following lessons of conduct are reinforced at the specified grade levels:*

Lower grades: One should learn to listen to the opinions of others and admit frankly one's own faults.

One should learn to behave unselfishly and learn to bare hardship. Middle grades: One should learn to live a life of moderation and to persist to the end with patience.

Upper grades: One should learn to be steadfast and accomplish goals undaunted by obstacles or failures. One should also learn to reflect always on one's word and behavior, to act with prudence and to live an orderly life.[40] *These goals illustrate how, very early, cultural values are consciously reinforced and promoted through the Japanese educational system.*

> *The function of the teacher also contributes to the child's overall development and motivation. Since World War II, there has been a change in the teacher's role and the philosophy of teaching in Japan. The pre-war*

teacher reflected the school of Idealism; the concrete knowledge the child might absorb was secondary to the moral virtue he acquired by emulating the teacher. The modern teacher in Japan, on the other hand, is an outgrowth of John Dewey's philosophy of Pragmatism; the teacher is primarily a conveyor of information and a way for the child to engage himself in the pursuit of learning. The general aim of the teacher is to command respect within a friendly relaxed environment. The teacher acts as a questioner, trying to get the children to share ideas and discover truth for themselves without being told. As a rule of thumb, the Japanese teacher demands a lot but dictates little.[41]

Children are encouraged to learn through exploration and experimentation and they are also urged to integrate their experiences: "In a short essay, sometimes composed in a school diary, the child is encouraged to bring together what is learned in school with what is experienced in his life."[42] *The interpenetration between school and family starts and continues at home:*

"In a recent poll, data indicates that mothers are consulted more frequently than any other adult, including teachers, on academic work."[43] *Both Japanese parents and Japanese schools are fully committed to the child's social and moral development as well as his academic progress.*

The group approach to child development creates a sense of collective responsibility which means that "people try very hard through preventative measures and conservative behavior to reduce the possibility of something going wrong."[47] *Even in the school setting, grade levels are geographically clustered to create a neighborhood. Perhaps this arrangement assists both teachers and students to "keep order and maintain high standards by mutual observation and peer pressure."*[48] *The group approach is also a serious deterrent to individual irresponsibility; if an individual fails, the effects are far more reaching than his immediate circle.*

When the West looks for flaws in the Japanese system, the first item the critics target is what they perceive to be an intrinsic lack of creativity in the Japanese school.

They assert that the Japanese can only imitate, they can not be inventive or original. White argues that the Japanese system does accord room for creativity:

> *Japanese schools are, like most of ours, routinized. But because positive engagement and enthusiasm are emphasized, even what an American would call creativity is elicited in certain classes. The outcomes of Japanese routinization are, surprisingly, a high degree of analytic and creative problem-solving, as well as expressions of divergent points of view.*[49]

At the elementary level, each Japanese child learns to play two instruments and to read music. In addition, he takes part in dramatic productions and receives instruction in drawing and painting. White notes the Japanese believe "before a child can be truly creative, or even express himself, he must be taught possibilities and limits of the medium; in short, one learns how to use the existing forms first."[50] *This same philosophic principle is employed by most American art schools; First one learns technique by imitating the masters, then one can expand and create on his own. The debate about creativity adds support to the contention that the Japanese educational system has never existed as the West conceives it. In 1919, John Dewey noted his surprise at having his expectations about the Japanese school contradicted by reality:*

> *They have a great deal of freedom there, and instead of the children imitating and showing no individuality--which seems to be the proper thing to say--I never saw so much variety and so little similarity in drawings and other handwork, to say nothing of its quality being much better than the average of ours. The children were good as well as happy; they paid no attention to visitors...I expected to see them all rise and bow.*[51]

At the primary level, the Japanese education system far exceeds the American system as the Japanese children are motivated to learn and are, consequently, actively engaged in their studies and their interest and enthusiasm are supported and reinforced at both home and school. The equal attention given to the development of body, mind and spirit encourages the growth of the total child. The teachers are treated and remunerated as professionals. Teachers feel they must be involved in teaching for the child to be

actively engaged in learning.

Japanese values have a positive effect on both the educator and the student. The group approach to education fosters communication between the family and the school; they work as a team for the child's welfare. In general, the elementary school experience, as an extension of the child's preschool experience is positive, productive and rewarding for the child. Most of the significant flaws in the Japanese system do not become evident until the child enters secondary school.

Critiques and Reforms in Japanese School

In recent years, internally, the Japanese system has come under intense criticism for a process of highly competitive entrance examinations which are required for a student to enter a Japanese high school or university. As White observes: "Entrance examinations remain one of the country's most difficult educational and social problems, and are seen as one of the main causes of student suicide, gangsterism, and classroom vandalism."[52] Gaps between the curriculum laid out by the Ministry of Education and the knowledge required to pass the entrance examinations for university have propagated the rise of juku, private after-school classes which have almost taken on a mandatory status. Although they are unaccredited and unregulated, they have become indispensable adjuncts to the formal education system. Due to the strength of the teacher's union, and in part due to juku, the formal school has been able to retain its harmonious environment and has successfully avoided the stress of competition; "teachers and the school system mostly refuse to become party to examination hysteria... The union feels that turning teachers into drill instructors would be dehumanizing , and cramming for examination a poor substitute for learning."[53] Both Eastern and Western observers tend to view critically the price of the entrance exam in light of the stress it puts on the student, the

family of the student, and Japanese society as a whole. The idea of the entrance examination also seems contrary to Japanese values and philosophies. The individual goes from the group environment, where one is evaluated by one's ability to be part of an integrated unit, to an extremely individualized evaluation process where one's future rests, more or less, on one's performance on a single do-or-die exam. The stress is compounded by the fact that in "Japan few opportunities exist to change paths or retool; the American idea that you can recreate yourself at anytime in life, that life is full of second chances, that the self-made person can get ahead, is in no way a Japanese reality."[54] Often in the face of the "examination hell," constructive support between the school and the home breaks down and the system brings out the worst aspects of mother dominance. The mother, anxious for her child to succeed, may feel the school, in maintaining its ideology of community and cooperation, is not doing enough to assist her child. Originally, the examination system was conceived because the country needed "a trained and talented elite to bring Japan into a competitive or at least dignified place in the industrializing world."[55] The examinations were open to all. The original concept was valid but the psychosocial problems manifested as they grew into prominence were not foreseen. Modern Japanese parents view the examinations as a necessary evil: "Nearly all deplore the system and its pressures, but nearly all also feel that they have little choice but to undergo its rigors."[56] Although recognition of the problem is widespread, there has, so far, been negligible change. Most parents attempt to thwart the child's stress by adopting a team approach to the examination.

In order to improve the system, the former Prime Minister Nakasone established an ad hoc Committee on Educational Reform in 1985 to critique Japanese education and formulate a set of ideas for improving it. The elements which they were particularly

concerned with are: "tracking in the secondary school, improving the school environment to enhance creativity and individual development and fostering international views and capabilities in Japanese children."[57] Japanese political and educational planners realize that the internationalization of people's thinking and lives due to Japan's position as an economic leader, may produce serious conflicts with their traditional culture and Japanese values. Throughout Japanese society, people are debating: What is Japan? What should Japan be? What should Japanese education should be? The intrinsic interpeneration of the Japanese societal structure causes an imbalance in one area to create and leading into an imbalance overall? In terms of reform, the Japanese emphasis on unity versus separateness, means that in order to effect change in one facet of the society, one must first anticipate change throughout the entire structure. For example, if women were suddenly to enter the workforce in significant numbers it would have an impact on the family unit, the educational system, the employment situation, and male/female role definitions. It would, in effect create a national crisis. Long cultivated in hansel, the Japanese seem for the most part, able to foresee the total consequence of any potential change. As a result, change in modern Japan will be a slow steady calculated process; they are no longer concerned with catching up to the West, only with maintaining their lead.

In addition, the Japanese now risk to lose a lot if new reforms fail. The examination system is the target of the most dramatic and visible of potential reforms; "the increase in the juku industry, the ubiquitous tutoring, and the diminution of family life and leisure with peers in service to the preparation of exams are given as evidence that the examinations must be deemphasized if not removed."[58] Education, for Japanese, has become a means of improving one's life and making the most of one's opportunities.

Knowing what one needs to do to succeed becomes, in itself, a source of motivation:

> *For the Japanese child, there are external standards to which everyone can in fact aspire. What counts is effort, the only constraints being physical health or the motivation provided by adults--most notably the mother. The existence of these society-wide standards, uncomplicated by great cultural diversity within the population or by great socioeconomic gaps between families, is itself a powerful source of motivation.*[59]

Concluding Remarks

Whatever solutions the Japanese devise for their problems, they will no doubt be a Japanese nature. Perhaps, the Western answers will not work within the Japanese context. As a nation, Japanese are a reflective self-aware society who want to preserve their cultural identity; "they are alert to the need to maintain their own cultural values and practices at the core of any new system adopted. They regard culture as an integral, dynamic part of their society and economy." For decades, the Japanese have managed to incorporate Western innovation while firmly retaining the essence of their own unique culture. Since they do not believe that progress is purchased at the cost of identity, it is safe to assume the Japanese will foster change in a completely Eastern manner. If they choose to initiate societal reforms, they will no doubt do so with the same attitude they incorporated during the Meiji Restoration of 1868: "Japanese Spirit with Western Knowledge." The transmission of this value to future generations is, to a large extent, the motivating factor that underlies Japanese achievement today.

Notes

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3. Ibid., p. 25.

4. White, p. 12.

5. Ibid., p. 12.

6. Ibid., p. 12.

7. Ibid., p. 13.

8. White, p. 21.

9. Lebra, Takie Sugiyama and William P., eds. Japanese Culture and Behavior. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, p. 205.

10. Ibid., p. 271.

11. Ibid.

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13. Ibid., p. 28.

14. Ibid., p. 29.

15. Ibid., p. 28.

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17. Ibid., p. 27.

18. Ibid., p. 28.

19. Ibid.

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26. White, p. 34.

27. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

28. Ibid., p. 17.

29. Ibid., p. 101.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 103.

32. Ibid., p. 99.

33. Ibid., p. 100.

34. Ibid., pp. 114-115.

35. Ibid., p. 68.

36. Ibid., p. 70.

37. Ibid.

38. Cogan, John J. and Schneider, Donald O., eds. Perspectives on Japan: A Guide for Teachers. Washington: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983, p. 67.

39. White, pp. 16-17.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 89.

42. Ibid., p. 119.

43. Ibid., p. 70.

47. Ibid., p. 72.

48. Ibid., p. 88.

48. Ibid., p. 80.

50. Ibid., p. 81.

51. Ibid., p. 122.

52. Cogan, John J. and Schneider, Donald O., eds. Perspectives on Japan: A Guide for Teachers. Washington: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983, p. 62.

53. Ibid., p. 76.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., p. 141.

56. Ibid., p. 143.

57. Ibid., p. 168.

58. Ibid., p. 172.

59. Ibid., p. 183.

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